1:Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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Appendix Three

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STANDARD OF LIVING IN SILWA

In discussing the standard of living in the village, the writer is aware that the term is essentially a relative or comparative one. Its application in such a manner is almost impossible as there is no way of comparing the present conditions of the village with those of the past or with those of the town. Certain changes in the demands of the peasants as a result of increasing contacts with town life will be discussed later; it is sufficient here to mention that the villagers, at least those who frequent the town, are aware of other standards of living to which they would like to attain. Consumption, production and human needs are sociologically relevant only in so far as they are related to a particular society. For a sociological enquiry human needs have no absolute validity independent of their cultural context and their knowledge by the members of that particular community. Beyond this any statements concerning minimum standard of living or basic needs inevitably imply a value judgment.[1]

Here the criterion to be adopted for the evaluation of the standard of living is an internal one; in other words, we are attempting to compute whether the land owned at present by the people in the village is sufficient to supply their needs as envisaged by the people themselves.

The main index for such an evaluation would be the relation between the average income and the average consumption *per capita*. The value of crops is estimated in the following computation according to 1951 prices.

The acre in winter crop produces on an average:[2]

Product	*Price per unit*[3] *in £E*	*Total*
4 ardabs of wheat ..	6	24
1 ardab of barley ..	3	3
1 ardab of beans ..	6	6
		£E33

[1] See J. E. Goldthorpe, 'An Examination of the Concept of Need', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. XLII, Section 10, 1950. Also, M. Read, *Native Standards of Living*.

[2] As a rule, for winter crop, two-thirds of the acre is sown with wheat and the rest with barley and beans. [3] The Egyptian pound is almost equivalent to the English pound.

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APPENDIX III

The summer crop is only of one kind, millet.[1]

Product		*Price per unit in £E*	*Total*
6 ardabs	..	3.50	£E 21

With every feddan a farmer can own the following animals:

1. A cow, which every two years would bring a calf worth £E6 income per year 3
2. A camel, which every three years would bring a camel worth £E6 per year 2
3. Five sheep, each bringing two lambs a year worth 30 piastres 3

Total income £E8

Thus the total income from cultivating an acre and the profits derived from animals per year amounts to .. £E61
Subtract for taxes and sowing seeds .. 1.50

Net income £E59.50

And as the *per capita* property of land is about one-third of an acre, then the *per capita* income from agriculture is about £E20. Moreover, according to the Postmaster, the village received (during the period of my field work) between £E400 and £E600 per month from those relatives who work in town, which, distributed per head, would make the total income per head £E21 per year.

511 On the other hand, it was more difficult to assess the *per capita* consumption of food and goods. The difficulty is obvious in a community which is self-sufficing in many ways, and which keeps no written records of its budgets. Expenditure, however, does not vary considerably from person to person in the village, and the following estimate will give an approximate picture.

[593] The consumption of bread has been estimated on the surest criterion which is the amount of crop that a father allows his son in his marital residence to take to his wife and children.

Winter Harvest

Two-thirds ardab of wheat for the husband
One-half ardab of wheat for the wife
One-quarter ardab of wheat for the child under seven
One-half ardab of barley for the husband
One-half ardab of barley for the wife (and chicken)
One-quarter ardab of barley for the child
One-twelfth ardab of beans per person

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[1] Dates are not included here as they are usually consumed daily by the family. Berseem is not also included in winter crop, being consumed by animals.

fellaheen of every other category see snatched from their hands; he can sell his few *cantars* of this precious crop for his own profit.

One feddan, on which he has spent about 30 piastres for seed, 100 piastres for chemical manure, and 70 piastres for taxes, irrigation, and petty expenses, may bring him in L.E. 10. If he is pressed for money the fellah sells his cotton at once to the money-lending merchant in his village, who takes advantage of the seller's need, of his ignorance of market fluctuations, and of the multitude of similar offers, to buy at the lowest price. If the fellah is more intelligent, he can take his cotton to the *halaqa*, or cotton market, of the neighbouring town. There, since 1912, weights and prices have been controlled by the Government, and buyers cannot trick the sellers.

When his need of money is less imperious, the small farmer does not sell his cotton immediately it is picked. He stores it in the *shoona* of a big landowner, a bank or a cotton firm, against an advance with which he can pay his most pressing debts. Offers to purchase are made at this store in piastres per *cantar*.

Sometimes the cotton is bought in advance; that is to say on sowing, the small farmer promises to deliver to so-and-so such-and-such a quantity of a given quality. The price is fixed either at the time, or on 'contract terms'. This means that it is based on a fixed minimum with a premium depending on the market value at Alexandria on whatever day suits the seller, provided that it be within the period agreed on at the time of contract.

Yet all these precautions intended to protect the smallholder cannot prevent him from being defrauded sadly often in the sale of his cotton, owing to his ignorance and individualism. It is the same with his other crops.

The *Crédit Agricole*, for example, makes advances on wheat, though only to small farmers, until they can sell their crops at the best price. So far so good. But the village middlemen can easily persuade the *omda* to give them certificates proving that they are also cultivators. They then buy corn at P.T. 120 an ardeb from the true fellaheen, who, not knowing where else to turn for money to pay their taxes, are glad to be able to sell. At the beginning of harvest this may seem a good bargain. But an *ardeb* is 175 kg.

in the village, while the *Crédit Agricole* takes it at only 150 kg. as in the cities, and advances 130 piastres (1937 prices) on each *ardeb*.

Your cunning merchant proceeds to deposit the wheat, which he pretends to have harvested, in the *shoonas* of the bank. He thus gains 10 piastres and 25 kilogrammes of wheat on each *ardeb* bought, and without assuming any risks himself can confidently expect an additional premium at the time of sale by the *Crédit Agricole*.

There are no walls but only low ridges or channels dividing the fields of Egypt. In the same way there is no sharp division between the various kinds of labour which we have just been analysing. None of these categories is self-sufficient, and each overlaps the next. There are few fellaheen who do not pass from one to another, or belong at the same time to two of them. The very conditions of the fellah's life imply a certain similarity in them all.

(1) *Poverty*. Because he knows nothing of either foresight or economy, and even more because he is weak, isolated and ignorant, the strong and the rich reap the fruits of his labours. The bank or the moneylender, the Government, the *omda*, or the landowner, gathers in most, if not all, of what he has sweated to produce. He himself, to use one of his own sayings, remains "poor as a needle, which clothes others but itself remains unclad".

(2) *Dependence*. The fellah can plant neither what he wishes nor when he wishes. As a day-labourer he works in a gang at a definite task under the strictest supervision. As tenant farmer or share-cropper he plants his crops according to the owner's plan. As landowner he is dependent with regard to dates and choice of crops on the orders of the Ministry of Agriculture. He has no sort of liberty or initiative one way or the other.

(3) *The minimum standard*. However bad his affairs may be, the fellah is at least certain of his daily bread. No-one actually starves to death in the country; for even under the worst conditions of labour the natural resources of the land remain.

(4) *Family Labour*. The help given to the fellah by his family must never be lost sight of. Among the Egyptian peasantry, wife, children, *gamoossa* and donkey make up

the cultivator's 'capital', and constitute the normal rural unit. 594

The head of the family works full-time on the land. His wife lends a hand at seed-time and harvest, rears poultry at home and makes butter and cheese for sale. His children look after the animals, take them to the fields or to water, gather the dung, watch the *saqia* and collect manure. For five or six weeks a year they work for wages at cotton-picking, or fighting the cotton worm, or in the ginning factory. The *gamoossa* draws the plough, turns the *saqia*, treads out the corn, and produces manure (mud soaked in urine), fuel (dung and straw), and milk. The donkey transports manure, crops, and the fellah himself. 594 231 241 461

Such a rural unit is sufficient, without any outside help, to cultivate five feddans.

Apart from his daily bread, or subsistence wage in the strictest sense, his year's work brings the fellah in at the most about L.E. 10 in cash. But his assistants are also consumers, and this money, which would otherwise be clear profit, has to be spent on such necessities as the following (pre-war prices are given) : 511 434

	P.T.
Oil for the kitchen, extra vegetables, occasional meat, sugar, tea	200
Oil or petroleum for the lamp, renewal of household articles such as plates or water-pots or apparatus such as baskets, summer forage for *gamoossa* and donkey	100
A new garment (dress or *gallabiya*) for each member of the family at time of feast	150
Expenses in time of sickness or rejoicing, or for superstitious practices, pilgrimage, or fines ..	50
Unforeseen expenses	500

In the last section, which alone presents any possibility of saving, come expenses such as those for circumcisions, funerals, marriages, or dowries, or sums paid for exemption from military service. There is always one or more of these to pay for, and often enough the budget shows a deficit.

In estimating the income L.E. 10 was given as a maximum. For these expenses L.E. 10 is a minimum. That is

511 why the balance of the fellah's budget is so easily upset,
434 and that is why he is so often swamped by debts and interest.

454 If in any given year, by a stroke of good fortune, none
181 of these extraordinary expenses befall him, the fellah, hoarding piastre after piastre in a pot hidden in the earth, can at last see his dream come true, and buy a *gamoosa* or a few *kirats* of land. It is this alluring possibility, always just round the corner, which makes him continue year after year, like the soil and with the soil, the same unwearying work.